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ABSTRACT

The comprehensive, developmental model of school counseling has gained much favor across the nation among educators. It is now time to assess its effectiveness. Counseling has had difficulty achieving the precision attainable in research in the physical sciences. Because of the intangible nature of many of the variables present in the counseling situation, problems of definitions of terms, criteria selection, measurement, and control are formidable. Consequently, most of the research in counseling has relied on correlational strategies that can elucidate relationships among variables but cannot specify causality. School counselors have an important role in research and evaluation. In this day of accountability it is the counseling outcomes of counseling programs that are on the line. Counselors need to set evaluation as a priority that is essential to the system support. Standards need to be set either locally or by states so that counselors, administrators, and the general public understand what school counseling programs are today. Counselor educators, in turn, need to teach to those standards. Counselor educators, state departments of education, and practicing school counselors must work in concert if school counseling is to be credible as a profession. (ABL)

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SCHOOL COUNSELING OUTCOMES AND RESEARCH

by

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School counseling traces its roots back to the turn of the century when the Vocational Choice Movement was started by Frank Parsons in Boston. This was the beginning of "scientifically" directing students to specific occupations which seem to meet their individual interests, aptitudes and skills. When vocational guidance efforts slowed down in the 1920's, school guidance was refocused to address personal and social issues of students. The Mental Health Movement brought specialists into the schools who became involved in diagnosis and psychotherapeutic intervention. The advent of Sputnik in 1957 evoked a massive infusion of federal money to train high school guidance counselors in the identification and encouragement of capable students to enroll in college, especially in math and science programs. In the 1960's and 70's, school counseling became part of a a constellation of student services which included school psychologists, social workers, and nurses. In the 1980's and 90's, the birth of the Developmental School Counseling model changed the emphasis of school counseling from being an ancillary service to the concept of being a comprehensive program, based on developmental principles. In

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this model, which is being promoted by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) as the preferred format, the positive aspects of the earlier approaches have been incorporated into a comprehensive program which includes group curricular experiences in which to develop life and career skills, individual advisement in educational and career decision-making, and counseling and consulting to ameliorate individual barriers to learning. This program approach is proactive, rather than reactive, and systematically reaches all students rather than just those who seek assistance or are referred. Comprehensive school counseling programs based on this model are considered an integral part of the educational program rather than an ancillary service. They are designed to prepare the whole student to live, learn, and work in the world of tomorrow.

Prevention and intervention are served equally in the comprehensive developmental model. Since it is logical to introduce preventative skills at the earliest opportunity, elementary school counseling has been growing rapidly as over one-fourth of our states have mandated school counseling programs at that level. Middle/junior high school counseling programs have also increased with the realization that career and pre-college guidance must begin before the high school years. Today, over 70,000 professional school counselors work in all levels of schools from pre-K to post-secondary.

The comprehensive, developmental model has gained much favor across the nation among educators. It is now time to assess its effectiveness. Counseling has had difficulty achieving the precision attainable in research in the physical sciences. Because of the intangible nature of many of the variables present in the counseling situation, problems of definition of terms, criteria selection, measurement, and control are formidable. Consequently, most of the research in counseling has relied on correlational strategies that can elucidate relationships among variables but cannot specify causality (Gelso, 1979). The effort to identify causal relationships has resulted in an increasing focus of research on very narrow topics that have little relevance to the day-to-day activities of counselors (Goldman, 1977). There has been research and documentation of various modules of school counseling programs. These range the effectiveness of small group interventions for children of divorce to the efficacy of school counselors based on their relationship to their principals. However, due to the newness of the comprehensive, developmental model, there have not been any longitudinal studies to validate the effectiveness of such an approach. Since many of the individual elements have been researched and found to be effective, one might hope that the combining of these strategies might produce a synergistic effect. However, until such studies have been conducted, one can only speculate on the validation of this approach.

In order to consider the research needs, one must identify the outcomes expected as the result of a developmentally-based comprehensive counseling program. Generally, ten results have been identified as desirable outcomes (Sears, 1992). As a result of the counseling program, high school graduates will be able to:

* develop effective relationships with others.
* apply their interests, skills, and aptitudes in the world of work.
* use a decision-making process when making important decisions.
* control and direct their feelings/emotions.
* resolve conflicts peaceably at home, school, or work.
* resist using alcohol and other drugs and engaging in other harmful forms of behavior.
* manage stress.
* utilize resources to set and reach educational goals.
* achieve realistic career goals.
* value lifelong learning.
* value traits/characteristics of people who are different.

Although the first six outcomes might be considered appropriate for any counseling intervention, the last four are unique to the educational setting.

One of the principal tasks of the school counselor is to help each student utilize available resources to make informed

educational decisions. This is usually accomplished through a combination of group guidance, in which information and sources of information are conveyed to the students, and individual advisement in which a student's aptitudes, interests, skills and aspirations are analyzed in order to make the best educational decisions. According to the National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor, (NACAC, 1990), "Of particular importance to student success is access to a strong precollege guidance and counseling program that begins early in the student's school career. Early planning (e.g., secondary school course selection and precollege enrichment programs) can insure that students pursue the most challenging curriculum that results in enhanced postsecondary educational options." The statement goes on to delineate the components of an effective precollege guidance and counseling program. Most of them would be considered generic to an effective school counseling program. They are:

* A written statement of philosophy that is consistent with the school's overall philosophy.
* A written comprehensive plan of action that outlines student needs and sets forth goals and objectives for meeting those needs.
* An evaluation process that measures progress toward meeting stated goals and objectives.

* A focus on precollege guidance and counseling that enables students to prepare themselves academically for a wide range of educational and career opportunities.
* Differentiated staffing that includes a sufficient number of counselors with counseling loads that enable them to accomplish program goals and objectives...
* Effective communication with a variety of constituencies, including students, parents, all educators, and the larger community.
* Counselors and other educators committed to the principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.
* A supportive instructional and administrative staff who work cooperatively with counselors to assist students in achieving educational goals consistent with their aptitudes, abilities, and interests.
* An environment that recognizes each person's worth in a complex multicultural, changing society, one that supports and encourages each student to reach his/her potential.
* Respect for student privacy and the need for confidentiality of records.
* Delivery of services according to ethical practices ...
* Assurances to students and parents that counseling professionals have been properly trained to carry out the precollege guidance and counseling responsibilities...
* Adequate facilities, resources, and equipment to accomplish the goals of the program.

These are the criteria against which any school counseling program should be evaluated. The same guidelines apply whether a student plans to continue his/her education or not. These criteria will utilize resources to set and reach educational and career goals, inculcate a desire for lifelong learning, and teach the valuing of diversity in all people. A comprehensive school counseling program, developmentally based, will also refine and develop life skills such as establishing effective relationships, becoming aware of one's feelings and emotions, learning methods of negotiation and conflict resolution, managing stress, and avoiding harmful behaviors. If these are the desired outcomes of school counseling program, how should they be measured?

Research in school counseling may be divided into two elements, program evaluation and counselor evaluation. Program evaluation should include the measure of effectiveness of individual program components as well as the effectiveness of the program as a whole. This might be appraised by evaluating the student's perception of their proficiency in achieving the ten outcomes listed previously. Ideally, a comparison could be made between a group of students who have experienced a comprehensive developmental counseling program over a sufficient number of years and a control group who have not participated in such a program. At this point, such a longitudinal study has not been possible. The seeds have been planted, though, is such places as

Des Moines, Iowa, where elementary counselors have been placed in all 41 elementary schools with a consistent ratio of 1:250. All schools are working toward a consistent approach using the comprehensive, developmental model. These students will be followed as they progress through the school system, provided funding is continued. Until that time, the American School Counselor Association has attempted to help individual schools evaluate their programs by offering self-audits at all levels. (ASCA, 1990) These audits are based on the assumption that there are broad professional principles of good practice, management, and conduct. The topics covered are (1) the philosophy, objectives, and policies of the guidance/counseling department; (2) the role and function of the guidance/counseling department in the school; (3) the role and function of the school counselor, including general role and function, personal counseling career guidance and counseling, college and financial aid guidance and counseling, ancillary services, testing, working in a consulting capacity, referrals, accountability, and identifying trends and issues; (4) specialized populations in counseling; (5) professionalism and the school counselor; and (6) professionalism and the field. Many states such as Mississippi (Mississippi, 1987) and Florida (Florida, 1979) have developed manuals to assess counseling programs. Others have depended on the local establishment of standards and measurement such as that done in Eugene, Oregon. (Hendrickson, 1983).

Action-oriented research of individual program components or activities has not been embraced by practicing school counselors despite encouragement and resources provided by ASCA. Such research is defined as being focused on immediate application, not on the development of theory or on general application. Its findings are to be evaluated in terms of local applicability, not universal validity. Its purpose is to improve school practices, and, at the same time, to improve those who try to improve the practices: to combine the research processes, habits of thinking, ability to work harmoniously with others and professional spirit. (Best, Kahn, 1987) ASCA has produced a professional development workshop entitled, "Developing Practical Action-Oriented Research for Demonstrating School Counselor Effectiveness and Accountability" (Allen, 1991) which has been given to all state school counselor associations for use in their states. Additionally, a booklet, "Desk Guide for School Counselor Research: Tips and Techniques" (Porter, 1991) was distributed to all state associations. Practicing school counselors were targeted as recipients for ASCA Research Grants but the resulting participation was very poor. One can only guess the reasons for the resistance of practicing school counselors to engaging in this method of accountability. All school counselors should have experienced some kind of exposure to research in pre-service training. Although fear of statistics seems to be common to many

counselors, there is some indication that counselors have little desire to upgrade the skills that would assist them in conducting research (Wilson, 1985). Sometimes there are also institutional barriers such as obtaining permission from parents or supervisors. Resistance from parents and administrators can be especially strong if the research design calls for some kind of control group that does not receive the services being evaluated. The question of who does not receive the treatment is always difficult to resolve in public school research in which presumably every child is equally entitled to available resources (ibid). The most frequently given reason is lack of time (Vacc, 1981). However, nearly every school requires some type of program evaluation which, unfortunately, often takes the form of general reactions, testimonials, and other forms of self-report. ASCA has since enlisted the assistance of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) to encourage counselor educators to assist in action research in local schools as a pro bono service to the profession. The University of Southern Maine requires that counselor interns conduct some type of action research during their internship within schools. They have the technical assistance of their academic intern supervisors to help them in the design and interpretation of such projects. It also provides a model for the field counselor supervisor. It is hoped that such application will help to remove whatever stigma exists

that keeps school counselors from using research methods in evaluating their programs. As Pine (1981) stated, "A single school counseling program is a research goldmine in terms of important questions, variety and richness of data, and numbers of potential researchers" (p. 498). Counselors who learn to conduct research will become valued members of their schools, capable of not only of enhancing their own program but of making significant contributions to the entire educational community.

Counselors are also in the unique position of using educational research in advising students. However, they must be aware of the relationship between bias (racism and sexism) and past and present research. (Campbell, 1986) The tests counselors use, the ways test results are interpreted, and counseling techniques are all based on educational research. Counselors are cautioned to remember that not all research is done well or accurately; societal attitudes about people of color and women influence research results; and news reports and research abstracts do not include enough information to enable one to evaluate the research. Bias may be more subtle now but a counselor must carefully analyze the conditions of the research and determine if the study results apply only to people who are similar to those studied or are overgeneralized to include others. Counselor preparation programs should emphasize the importance of interpreting research as well as objectivity in conducting accountability studies.

Research into counselor evaluation has produced a plethora of personal indicators of counselor effectiveness. No matter what the situation is, clear communication and support for the development of efficient, effective, and professional definitions of the counselor's role must be established between the counselor and his/her supervisor. (Stickel, 1990) One of the greatest complaints of school counselors is that they are often evaluated with the same instrument that is used for teachers. This is due to the fact that performance appraisal is often linked to negotiations. The majority of school counselors operate within the teachers' contract and are a part of their bargaining unit. Therefore, evaluation is not differentiated. However, some school districts such as DeKalb County, Georgia, have developed an instrument for collecting information from assistant principals, head counselors, teachers, and students. (Tucker, 1988) Competency areas included: Relating to Others; communication; Professionalism/Ethics; Planning and Implementation; and Demonstrating High Expectations. Although no single instrument can incorporate all job-related behaviors, this counselor evaluation instrument includes behaviors shared by most counselors. The Houston, Texas, Counselor Quality Assurance Program Manual (McIntire, 1983) addresses the renewal and professional growth opportunities for school counselors. Assessment is achieved through a team process. The Johnson

O'Connor Research Foundation (Foxley, 1982) administered aptitude tests to a sample of guidance counselors. The guidance counselor sample scored significantly higher than the general population in Ideaphoria (a measure of verbal fluency), Inductive Reasoning (quickness in seeing relationships) and Pitch Discrimination. The high Ideaphoria and Inductive Reasoning scores were expected because the counselor's job appears to use these aptitudes; the high scores on the music test, however, do not have a ready explanation. One study reported a possible pitfall in the evaluation of school counselors (Montgomery, 1979). Counselors who support students' self-exploration may be evaluated less favorably than counselors who make decisions for the students. Two theoretical approaches to school counseling are the guidance of student personnel services approach and the counseling psychotherapeutic approach. If credibility data are collected according to the criteria of the guidance orientation, but counselors employ a psychotherapeutic approach, the results become meaningless. Yet these results are often used for decisions concerning the support for counseling. This study again emphasizes the need for clear communication in evaluating the school counselor.

The research needs for the future are those that will demonstrate the effectiveness of school counseling programs. If the comprehensive, developmental approach to school counseling programs is to be supported, longitudinal research must be conducted to assess its value. Until that time, we must rely on research of individual program activities, e.g., children's social skills (Elliott, 1987). The preparation for such a

longitudinal study would require the development of consistent standards among such programs. The ratio of counselors to students will have to be considered because counselor availability has a significant impact on perceptions of counselor effectiveness. (Boser, 1988). Separate studies would probably have to be conducted to determine ideal ratios because the same program may require differing amounts of counselor attention according to the population served. The stated purpose of a comprehensive school counseling program is to serve all students. There will never be enough counselors to reach all students effectively through individual contact. Therefore, group work is emphasized as an effective methodology to achieve program goals. Research needs to validate the effectiveness of group work, both small group counseling and large group guidance. Finally, research needs to be conducted concerning the resistance of practicing school counselors to engage in research. At a time when the survival of the counseling profession in the public schools may depend on the ability of its members to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services, the majority of counselors do not engage in research or in evaluation activities. It has been suggested that this can happen only if the goals of the guidance program are restructured, altering the priority of counselors' tasks, and modifying the expectations of various groups within and outside the school. (Wilson, 1985).

Counselor educators have a significant responsibility to the school counseling profession for conducting research in the schools. First, they have the motivation to conduct research themselves because of the publish or perish philosophy inherent in most universities. Longitudinal studies will have to be conducted by those who have access to students across the grade levels. This may be a central office supervisor or a counselor educator. Counselor educators also have a responsibility to assure that preservice counselors are well trained both in research methodology and practice. Counselor education programs must be examined to determine the reasons that practicing school counselors do not use their research knowledge after leaving the post-secondary setting. Last, counselor educators must help practicing school counselors to use their knowledge and accessibility to students to provide the needed evaluation and research to improve programs. Pine (1981) proposed a solution he called collaborative action research, whereby university faculty and school counselors cooperate in seeking solutions to practical problems that arise in providing guidance and counseling services to students. In contrast to the usual situation in which researchers enter the school without the equal participation of counselors, research responsibilities are shared and counselors serve as co-authors of research reports. Such integration of research and practice draws on the university researcher's knowledge of methodological issues and procedures and the school

counselor's familiarity with the issues to be investigated. Thus the strengths of both groups are used.

School counselors also have an important role in research and evaluation. In this day of accountability, it is the counseling outcomes of their programs that are on the line. They need to set evaluation as a priority that is essential to the system support. They must reach out for assistance, if necessary, and welcome strategies that may strengthen their programs.

The bottom line is that we all need to work together. Standards need to be set either locally or by states so that counselors, administrators, and the general public understand what school counseling programs are today. Counselor educators, in turn, need to teach to those standards. Counselors must be prepared to assume the role expected of them on the first day of practice. Counselor educators, state departments of education, and practicing school counselors must work in concert if we are to be credible as a profession. We are no longer trying to figure out who we are. We know. Now we must produce the research to convince the rest of the world that school counseling programs are vital in preparing our young people for their futures.

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Wilson, N.S., (1985). School counselors and research: Obstacles and opportunities. School Counselor

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON SCHOOL COUNSELING RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Allen, J. (1991) Developing Practical Action-Oriented Research for Demonstrating School Counselor Effectiveness and Accountability

This is a step-by-step research guide for practicing school counselors.

American School Counselor Association (1990). Professional Development Guidelines for Elementary School counselors. A Self-Audit.

Professional Development Guidelines for Middle/Junior High School Counselors: A Self-Audit.

Professional Development Guidelines for Secondary School Counselors: A Self-Audit. Second Revision.

These three audits provide a detailed self-study for school counseling program evaluation.

Pine, G.J. (1981) Collaborative action research in school counseling: The integration of research and practice. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 59, 495-501.

This article provides a model for research collaboration between counselor educators and practicing school counselors.

Porter, J. (1991). Desk Guide for School Counselor Research: Tips and Techniques.

This is a handy source for school counselors which demystifies research.

Wilson, N.S., (1985). School counselors and research: Obstacles and opportunities. School Counselor.

This article summarizes the positive and negative aspects of conducting research in public schools.